

"If you missed our news today, you can read it in the papers tomorrow."

BUOYED by all the earnest hot air at the IPI conference in Cape Town last February, some delegates took off on some really serious business — an election prognostication tournament.

The Poynter Institute's Robert Hai-man asked competitors to predict the results of the April elections. Allister Sparks and Govin Reddy came closest to the ANC's final tally of 62,6 per cent of the votes although Govin spoils his performance somewhat by failing to predict the return of the IFP. Best predictor of the NP's 20,4 per cent was Tony Heard, who gave them 20 per cent. (Worst was Joe Thloloe, who gave the Nats 12 per cent. But then his prediction of a 24 per cent vote for the PAC obviously influenced him somewhat.)

The only two South Africans who came close to the DP's poor showing of 1,7 per cent were Govin Reddy (one per cent) and Guy Berger (two per cent) — most saw the DP as clocking around 4–5 per cent. Which, given the editorial support shown the DP, seems to suggest a rather modest belief by some of our senior writers in the power of their own words.

Not all contestants were editors though and, embarrassingly for those who see themselves as professionals in these matters, Mrs Muffy Featherstone (who attended with husband John) proved better at predicting the results than some of our Mahogany Row occupants.

RADIO 702 chirped recently: "If you missed our news today, you can read it in the papers tomorrow." Well, yes—except that to get news about a 702 staffer in a court case, your only source would have been the press, a medium which soaked up the story in all its salacious and unsavoury detail. Shows there's still a place for print, even if it's only to unblock your brain.

THAT place, of course, is not always in the open. In all seriousness this columnist has to reveal that in the bad old days at the SABC journalists leaving the *Weekly Mail* on their desks were liable to damage their careers. Which leaves one



BY THOMAS FAIRBURN

wondering whether *The Citizen* is now the paper not to be seen reading.

WHILE on about the SABC, Australian broadcaster Bob Wurth's report on the organisation has left some staffers feeling bruised. In one backhanded compliment, he noted Radio South Africa broadcasters have "beautifully modulated voices, their pronunciation appears excellent." The result, however, was that RSA sounded "very much like an English broadcasting station of the 'forties' or 'fifties'." Noted Wurth: "Unfortunately, they don't sound much like the vast majority of English-speaking South Africans, black, white or coloured." Ja, wellnofine.

Other withering observations:

- The size of parts of the SABC operation in the Western Cape "is truly astounding and smacks of feather-bedding, inefficiency and gross over-staffing". What seemed to puzzle our man from the out-back was that even with such "blatant misuse of resources" none of the 180 SABC staff in the region appear to broadcast to, or even cater for, the estimated one to two million Xhosa-speaking people there.

- Not that it would take many staffers to meet this need, judging by previous staff-

ing practices. Seems six black Radio Xhosa journalists based in Port Elizabeth handle news and current affairs for a national audience of two million. And 90 minutes of prime-time public affairs programming to five million Zulu listeners is put out by one lone reporter-producer-presenter on a shift basis. By contrast, Wurth noted 19 journalists work out of Bloemfontein where there is no local African station and one overwhelmingly white station, Radio Oranje, with an average day audience of only 235 000.

- The man from Down Under also dug up the fact that Radio Metro has 2 940 000 listeners, double the combined audience for Radio South Africa and Afrikaans Stereo. Yet "Metro does not enjoy anywhere near the resources of either Radio South Africa or Afrikaans Stereo".

It gets worse. At Auckland Park, the non-programme tail wags the programme dog. A "highly excessive" overall staffing complement of 1412 includes an "awesome" 137 clerks and secretaries. News management is plagued by "an archaic, bureaucratic and technologically deprived operation".

Now there's a management challenge. Sort of in the order of trying to readjust the black and white bits on a Friesland cow. Good luck, Zwelakhe.

PITY the management at *The Star* — currently wrestling with affirmative action. Starting on an enthusiastic note by getting departments to account for their AA performance, they elicited a hefty smack in the belly from staffers insulted at the thought of being collected for their skin colour. Seems one department tried to tot up their "brownie points" by scoring a black, female and Moslem staffer as three credits. Now, if she'd been quadriplegic as well...

AS reported elsewhere in *Review*, the *Pretoria News* has proudly pioneered 4th Wave production among English language dailies. But not everyone is rushing to copy the trailblazers — this columnist understands the *Natal Witness* has rented the *Pretoria News'* Atex dinosaur. Anyone for hot metal?